**Language and Imagery and Style**

1. *great attention to detail/description*
2. *use of imagery*
3. *allusion*
4. *twisting positive to negative*
5. *language of oppression*
6. *personal pronouns ‘ they’ and ‘we’*
7. *positive vs negative atmospheres*

Attwood is a poet as well as a novelist and she is fascinated by the uses and abuses of language as a powerful instrument for resistance on the one hand and for oppression on the other.

**Language of oppression**

* The leaders understand the importance of language as a means of social control; very insidious because rituals of naming determine the way we think about our lives. Atwood associates Gileadeans with Stalin and Hitler who dehumanized middle-class peasants and Jews in order to justify killing them.
* Gilead’s official language has many **biblical allusions** – its propaganda is Bible-based rhetoric which represents a distortion of its sources (mainly the Book of Genesis) in the interests of an official policy or ideological position. = an abuse of the Bible rather than an endorsement of its teachings. Its social principles are based on the Old Testament where patriarchal authority is justified as the law of God. Archaic language of patriarchy is to be found in the OT (a common use of extreme sects which use it as a means of social control).
* Uses and abuses the Bible in the same way it uses the slogans of the old ideology. Chooses not to use an OT reference in Hosea 6:8: “*Gilead is a city of wicked men, stained with footprints of blood*.” Aunt Lydia says “**Blessed are the meek**” but she leaves out “*for they shall inherit the earth*”. Bible suggests that the downtrodden can look forward to eternal reward but the ideology of G suggest the opposite: the women’s glory comes from their meekness and they will always be meek. Gilead uses Biblical language when convenient even if that means taking phrases out of context and destroying their intended meaning.
* The law enforcers are named after OT figures: the Guardian Angels, the Eyes of the Lord. Handmaids; Martha = woman who served Christ;
* First quotation in the epigraph: Genesis 30:1-3 is the beginning of the story about Jacob and his two wives Rachel and Leah and their two handmaids who are required to produce children for them = the basis of the novel.

Repeated in the family Bible reading before the monthly Ceremony

Also the Rachel and Leah Centre

Also Offred: ‘**Give me children, or else I die**’ can have more than one meaning for her as a Handmaid (Ch 11).

* *Angels* who fight in battalions with names like ‘Angels of the Apocalypse’ and ‘Angels of Light’. Wear black uniforms. Also possibly linked to New York ‘guardian angels’ a paramilitary force used to curb social violence.
* ‘**they**’ used to refer to the powers; creates sense of ominousness, faceless, controlling, no say; contrast between them and us (handmaids) = discrete factions, no interaction, no say; depersonalizes it like when Luke referred to the cat as it because he intended to kill her. Ch 30 she describes the process of depersonalization: ‘**you have to create an it, where none was before**.’

Cf ‘**we**’ ‘**We would be up to no good and they would know it**.’

* ‘**in the time before**’ = sense of mystery, intrigue, also nostalgia, past times that were better, contrast between then and now
* **The Wall** = a symbol of oppression. First mentioned P.41 – negative – ‘**Now the gates have sentries and there are ugly new floodlights mounted on metal posts above it, and barbed wire along the bottom and broken glass set in concrete along the top.**

**No one goes through those gates willingly**.’

* Cf page before: memory of the river in the time before’: **There’s a boathouse where they kept the sculls once, and some bridges; trees, green banks, where you could sit and watch the water, and the young men with their naked arms, their oars lifting into the sunlight as they played at winning.**’ = scene of light, sun, warmth and beauty = contrast with the Wall and what it stands for described on the next page. Followed by detailed description of the people hanging on the Wall with bags over their heads.
* **Unbabies** = deformed babies
* **Unwomen** = former feminists

**Language of resistance**

* Language is used to relieve the bleakness of Offred’s narrative. She uses images of flowers, gardens, the human body – all suggest a different way of relating to the world from the repressive official discourse of Gilead.

ch 41: **I wish this story were different….I’m sorry there’s so much pain in this story….I’ve tried to put some of the good things in as well. Flowers, for instance, because where would we be without them:**’

* It is through the language she uses rather than the events she tells, that Offred convinces us of her resistance to Gilead’s values. Her outer life is constricted and no emotion is allowed; her inner life with its memories, images, humour allows her to survive emotionally as well as physically. There is a contrast between the language she uses to record her everyday life and the language of her real feeling and memory.
* A small number of recurrent images form patterns: human body (hands, feet, faces, eyes, blood, wombs); nature (flowers, gardens, changing seasons, colour and light); creates a feminine language that works in opposition to Gilead’s regime.
* ‘**Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last**.’ Ch2
* ‘**What we are supposed to feel towards these bodies is hatred and scorn. This isn’t what I feel…What I feel is partly relief, because none of these men is Luke. Luke wasn’t a doctor. Isn’t**.’ Ch6
* ‘**It is through a field of such valid objects that I must pick my way, every day and in every way. I put a lot of effort into making such distinctions. I need to make them. I need to be very clear in my own mind**.’ Ch6
* **Those who believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance. If it’s a story I’m telling then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending to the story, and real life will come after it…**Ch7
* smell of baking…**’This is a treacherous smell, and I know I must shut it out**.” Ch8
* **The knife she uses is sharp and bright, and tempting; I would like to have a knife like that.**
* Garden shears
* “**Nolite te bastardes carborundorum**” a forbidden message to the one who came after – a message of resistance. Ch9

Also repeated at p102 when she is supposed to be praying in the Commander’s presence.

* ‘I keep the knowledge of this name like something hidden, some treasure I’ll come back to dig up, one day. I think of this name as buried.’Ch14
* Ch 16 (butter on face)**as long as we do this…we can believe that we will some day get out…**’
* Will not give up hope of getting out: ‘**I believe in the resistance as I believe there can be no light without shadow; or rather, no shadow unless there is also light…Any day now there may be a message from him**.’ (Ch18)
* Ch 23 Still lying on bed after birth with thoughts of getting out: “**Let’s stop there. I intend to get out of here. It can’t last forever.”**
* Ch 41 Salvaging: ‘**I’ve begun to shiver. Hatred fills my mouth like spit**.’